



Disparities in California's Child Care Subsidy System: A Look at Teacher Education, Stability and Diversity

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Introduction

In the past 30 years, California, like other states, has diversified the types of early care and education (ECE) settings in which it invests public funds. Before 1976, the California Department of Education (CDE) funded child care services for children of low-income families *only* through direct contracts with center-based child care programs, including full-day child development centers and part-day preschool programs. In addition, since 1964, the federal government has contracted with certain local agencies or centers to provide services through the nationwide Head Start program.

From the beginning, standards for the CDE- and Head Start-contracted programs were more stringent than those established by the Community Care Licensing division of the California State Department of Social Services (DSS) for non-subsidized, private child care centers, and they remain so. Since 1976, however, the Alternative Payment Program has been integrated into CDE's child development funding, allowing low-income families to use vouchers to access child care services in private, licensed programs, including centers and family child care homes. In 1991, with the implementation of the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant, and again in 1997 with the establishment of California's welfare reform program, CalWORKs, an infusion of federal dollars enabled a large number of low-income families to use their subsidy to access child care in license-exempt settings, including the homes of family members, friends or neighbors, as well as in centers and licensed family child care homes.

Thus, in California today, many licensed ECE programs – and a large number of license-exempt providers – receive public dollars to care for children of low-income families. While, a generation ago, the term “subsidized child care” carried a very specific meaning, referring to certain forms of center-based care that were required to meet higher standards, it is now a much more general term covering the entire regulatory and programmatic spectrum.

As a result, because of this diversity of requirements due to two different licensing standards, it is important to understand whether there are significant differences in the quality of early education and care that subsidy-eligible children

receive, depending on what is available to and/or preferred by their families. This is especially urgent in light of recent research demonstrating major school readiness and achievement gaps among children of different ethnic and economic groups, with high-quality preschool programs shown as effective in reducing these gaps (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips & Dawson, 2004; Henry, Gordon, Henderson & Ponder, 2003; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson & Mann, 2001; Schulman, 2005; Schulman & Barnett, 2005; Schweinhart et al., 2005). Children living in low-income households have been found to derive even more benefit than other children from high-quality early care and education (Helburn, 1995).

This policy brief focuses on differences in staff characteristics between licensed centers that receive public dollars solely through vouchers, and those that receive public dollars through a contract with Head Start or the California Department of Education.¹ Specifically, we will focus on three issues – professional preparation, staff stability (turnover and tenure), and staff diversity (including ethnicity and language) – using findings from the *California Early Care and Education Workforce Study* (Whitebook et al., 2006a&b).² This study, commissioned by First 5 California in 2004, collected demographic and educational data on the state's early care and education workforce in licensed homes and centers.

It is important to note that, while the California Workforce Study provides a description of the demographics and education of the ECE workforce, it did not directly assess teachers' overall knowledge and skills, or the content of the training and coursework they had completed. Yet the variables under consideration – professional preparation, stability and diversity – are widely considered to be essential elements of a high-quality early care and education program (Helburn, 1995; Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1998; Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber & Howes).

The data presented here will allow us to determine whether and to what extent there are variations, with respect to these key quality indicators, among different types of settings that receive public dollars. Although these findings cannot definitively establish that poor children in various subsidized settings are denied equitable care in terms of quality, they add to the evidence of such inequity (Phillips et al., 1994),

¹ Some contracted centers also receive vouchers, but even if they do, they must meet the more stringent requirements of being contracted. In this paper, for the sake of simplicity, we will refer to “contracted centers,” “centers receiving vouchers,” and “centers with neither contracts nor vouchers” as three distinct groups.

² A similar comparison regarding subsidy in home-based care would also be useful – i.e., between licensed family child care providers receiving vouchers, license-exempt providers receiving vouchers, and licensed providers not receiving any subsidy. Such a comparison is beyond the scope of this brief, however, since the California Early Care and Education Workforce Study did not collect data on license-exempt care.

Table 1. Estimated Number and Percentage of Centers Receiving Public Dollars, and Estimated Number of Staff in These Centers

		Centers	Assistant Teachers	Teachers	Directors	Total
Head Start or CDE contract	Total number	2,346	12,011	10,167	1,824	24,002
	Percentage	30%	53%	23%	26%	32.4%
Vouchers/No contract	Total number	3,235	6,258	21,536	3,165	30,959
	Percentage	41%	28%	48%	46%	41.8%
No vouchers/No contract	Total number	2,277	4,361	12,877	1,918	19,156
	Percentage	29%	19%	29%	28%	25.8%
All centers	Total number	7,858	2,2630	44,580	6,907	74,117
	Percentage	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

and are presented here in order to foster further discussion of possible policy remedies in California and other states.

Workforce Study Methodology

The study population for the center-based portion of the study included the 8,740 active licensed centers serving children birth to five years that were listed as of January 2004

with California's state-funded child care resource and referral agencies. The sampling plan for the study was developed to ensure that there were enough completed interviews to analyze the data statewide, as well as for four regions of the state: the Bay Area, and Northern, Central and Southern California. The Field Research Corporation, Inc., collected data from a statewide random sample of 1,921 licensed centers, using computer-assisted telephone interviewing. Center interviews were conducted with the director in English.

Table 2. Comparison of Title 22 and Title 5 Regulations for Child Care Center Staff

Position	Title 22	Title 5 (CDE-contracted centers)
Assistant teacher	None	6 college-level credits in Child Development (CD)/Early Care and Education (ECE)
Associate teacher	Not specified	12 college-level credits in CD/ECE
Teacher	12 college-level credits in CD/ECE; 6 months experience	
Center teachers: Title 5 (CDE Contracted Centers)	12 college-level credits in CD/ECE; 6 months experience	24 college-level credits in CD/ECE; 16 general education (GE) credits
Site supervisor	Not specified	AA or 60 credits including: 24 credits in CD/ECE; 16 GE credits; 8 administration credits
Program director	12 college-level credits in CD/ECE; 3 credits in administration	BA or higher including: 24 credits in CD/ECE; 8 credits in administration

³ Note: Throughout this report, as in the Workforce Study itself, data for CDE- and Head Start-contracted centers are combined, for two reasons. First, the sample size was relatively small for contracted programs; second, the purpose of this report, conceptually, was not to compare *types* of contracts (CDE vs. Head Start), but rather to compare contracted centers with centers receiving vouchers.

Centers subsidize the cost of services for children enrolled in their programs as a condition of a contract the center holds with the federal Head Start program or with the California Department of Education (CDE), or by accepting vouchers available to families through CalWORKs and Alternative Payment Program (APP) funding. Thus, to determine whether programs enrolled any children who received public child care assistance, we first asked whether the program held a contract with Head Start or CDE.³ If they did not hold a contract, directors were then asked whether they enrolled at least one child receiving subsidy through a voucher. Child care centers were then coded into three public funding categories: contracted centers, centers receiving vouchers, and centers with neither contracts nor vouchers.

We found that 71 percent of child care centers were receiving public funds to care for and educate children of low-income families. Thirty percent of centers received this funding through contracts with Head Start or CDE, and 41 percent received it in the form of vouchers. (See Table 1.)

Question 1: How does the professional preparation of staff vary by centers' subsidy status?

Overview

Educational requirements vary for California's center-based ECE workforce, depending on whether or not centers hold

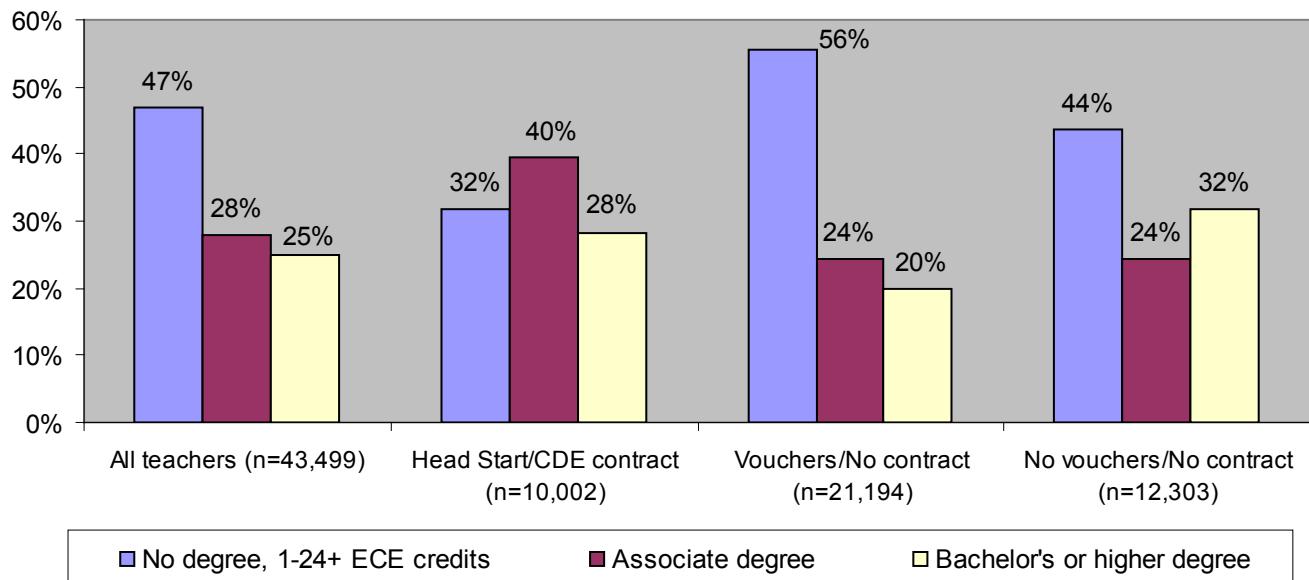
a contract with Head Start or the California Department of Education. (See Table 2.) Teachers and directors in licensed centers, including those in centers receiving public funds through vouchers, are required only to meet licensing standards, which include 12 college credits of early childhood education. In contracted centers, however, teachers and directors are required to complete 24 college credits of ECE and 16 credits of general education, and directors must also complete eight credits related to administration. Beyond these requirements, Head Start centers must meet additional regulations established by the federal Head Start Bureau.

Educational Attainment

We found that the educational attainment of staff varied by centers' relationship to public subsidy. Whereas only 20 percent of teachers in centers receiving vouchers had attained a bachelor's or higher degree, 28 percent of their counterparts in contracted centers, and 32 percent in centers with no public funding, had done so. (See Figure 1.)

Notably, we found that teachers of all ethnic groups employed in contracted centers had achieved higher levels of education than teachers in centers receiving vouchers. As shown in Figure 2, for example, 58 percent of Latina teachers in contracted centers had attained an associate degree or higher, compared to 36 percent of Latina teachers in centers receiving vouchers. Seventy-two percent of African Ameri-

Figure 1. Estimated Educational Attainment of Teachers: Statewide, and By Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy



Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers. Less than 1% of teachers have no degree/no college ECE credits.

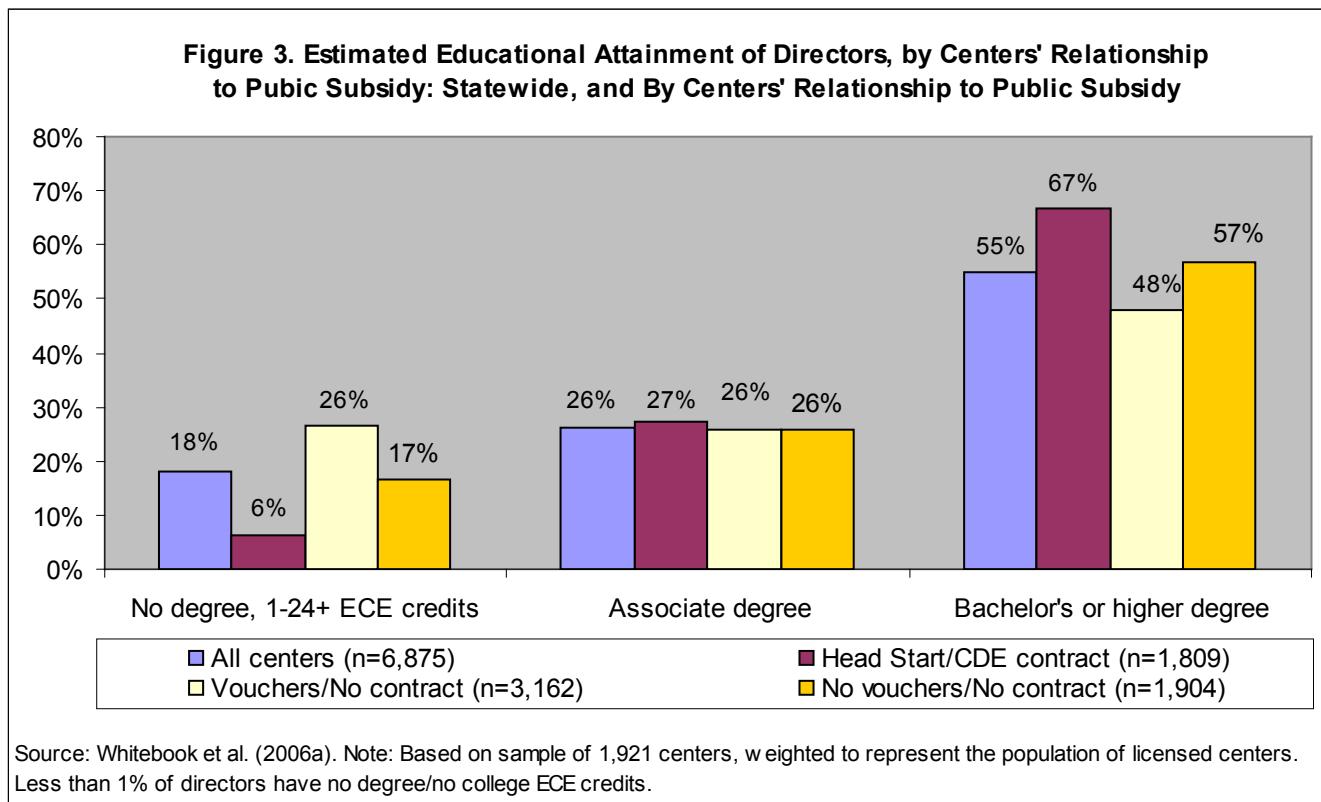
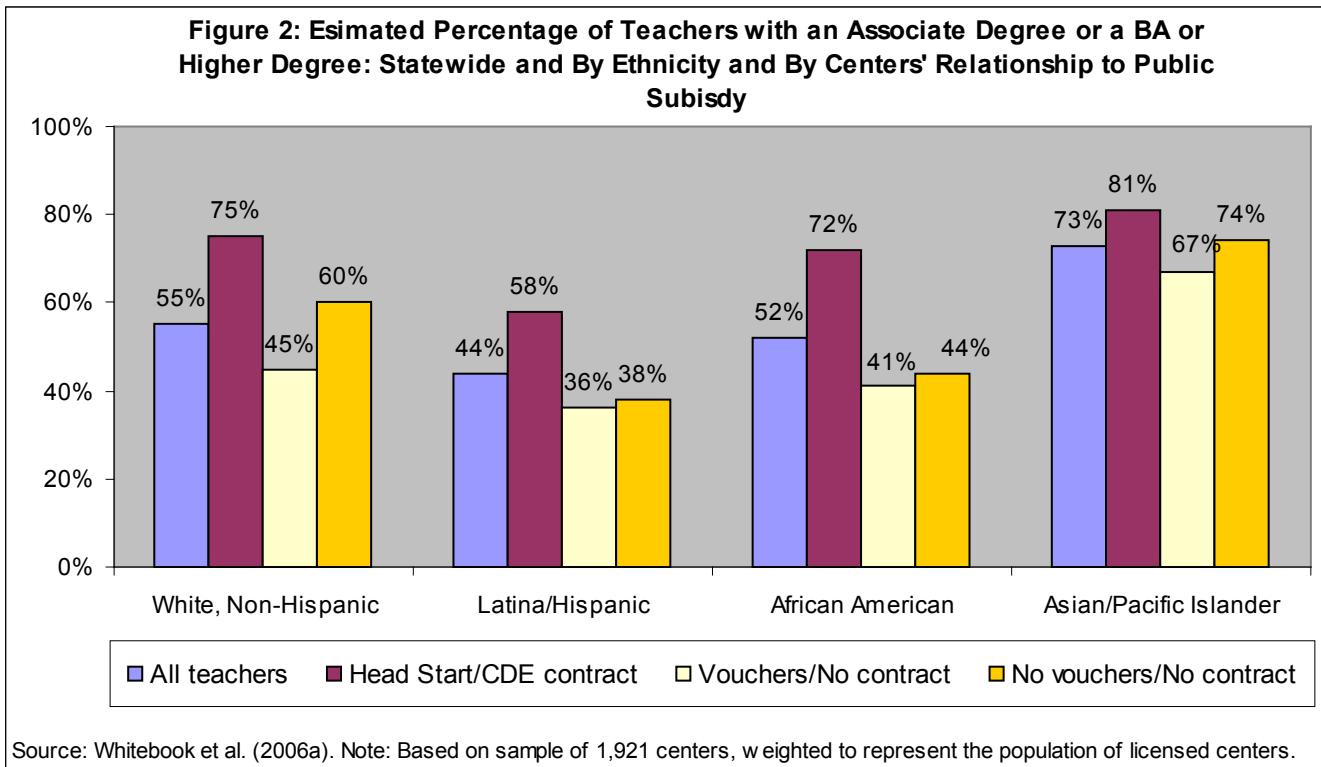
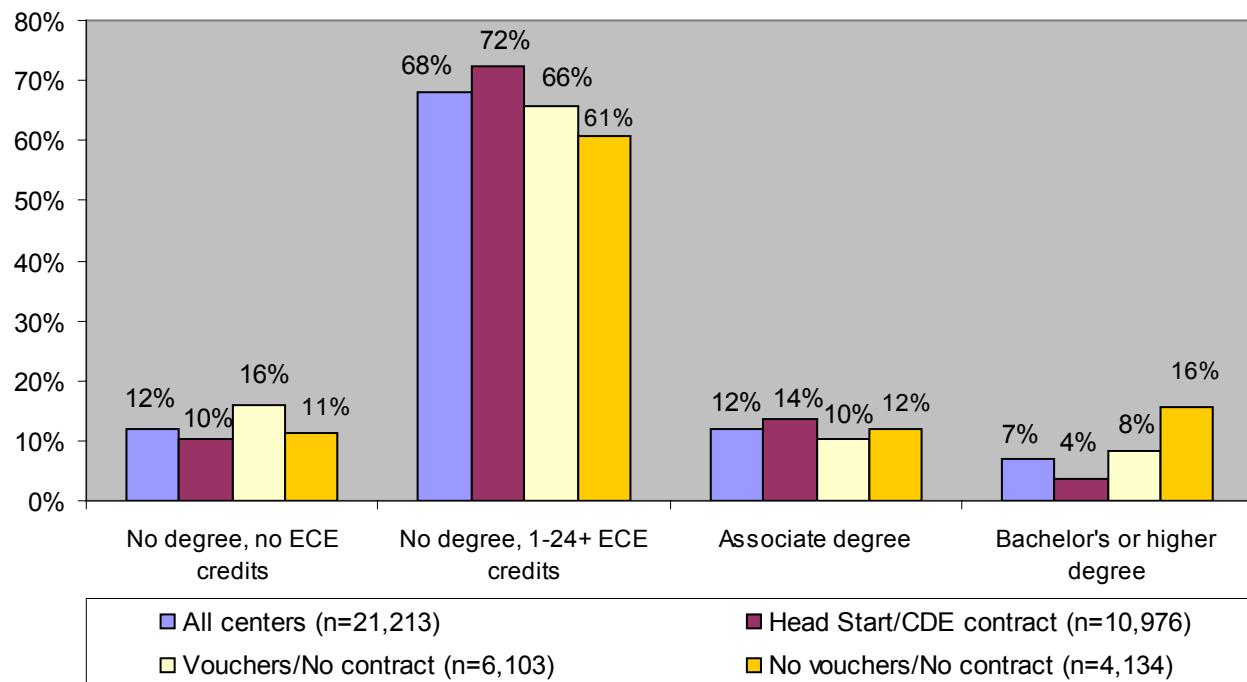
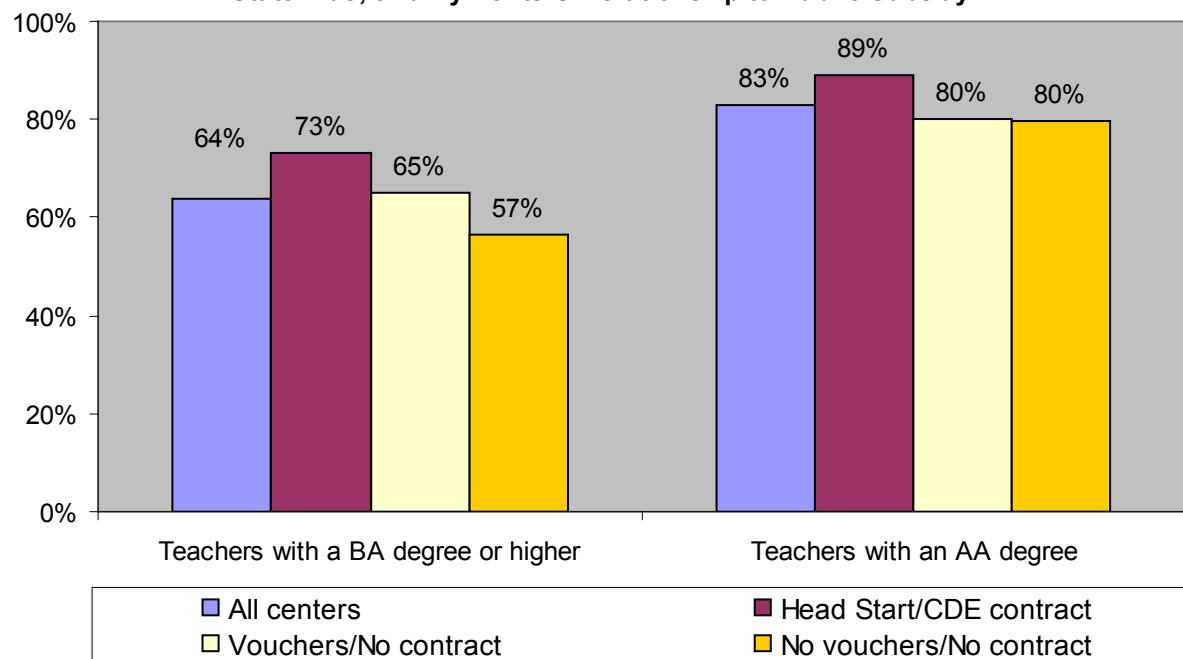


Figure 4. Estimated Educational Attainment of Assistant Teachers: Statewide, and By Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy



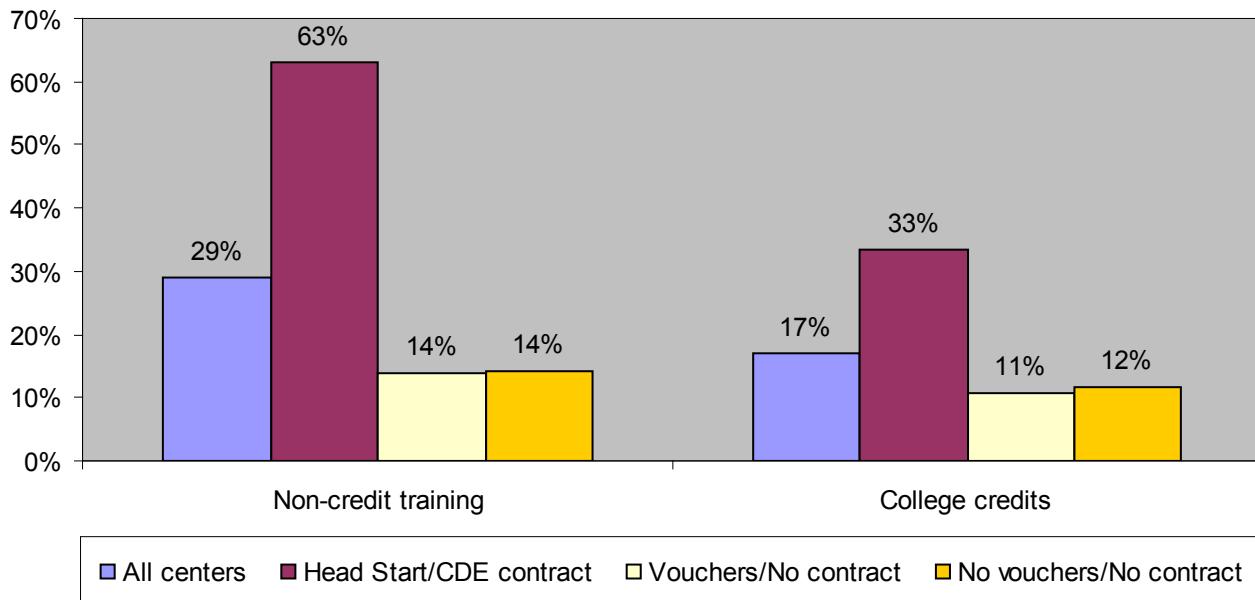
Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

Figure 5: Estimated Percentage of Degreed Teachers with a Degree In ECE: Statewide, and By Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy



Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

Figure 6: Estimated Mean Percentage of Teachers Who Have Completed Training/Education Related to Dual Lanugage Learning Children: Statewide, and By Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy



Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

can teachers in contracted centers had attained a college degree, compared to 41 percent of their counterparts in centers receiving vouchers.

Directors of contracted centers were also more likely to have attained a bachelor's or higher degree (67 percent) than directors of centers receiving vouchers (48 percent). (See Figure 3.) Finally, assistant teachers in centers receiving vouchers were somewhat less likely to have a degree or credits in ECE than were their counterparts in contracted centers. (See Figure 4.)

While a higher percentage of teachers employed in contracted centers than in non-contracted centers had attained a bachelor's or higher degree, there were no significant differences between the two types of programs in the percentage of such centers employing at least one teacher with such a degree. In fact, 67 percent ($SE=2.3$) of centers receiving no public funding reported employing at least one teacher with a bachelor's or higher degree, compared to 55 percent ($SE=2.1$) of contracted centers and 58 percent ($SE=2.0$) of centers receiving vouchers.

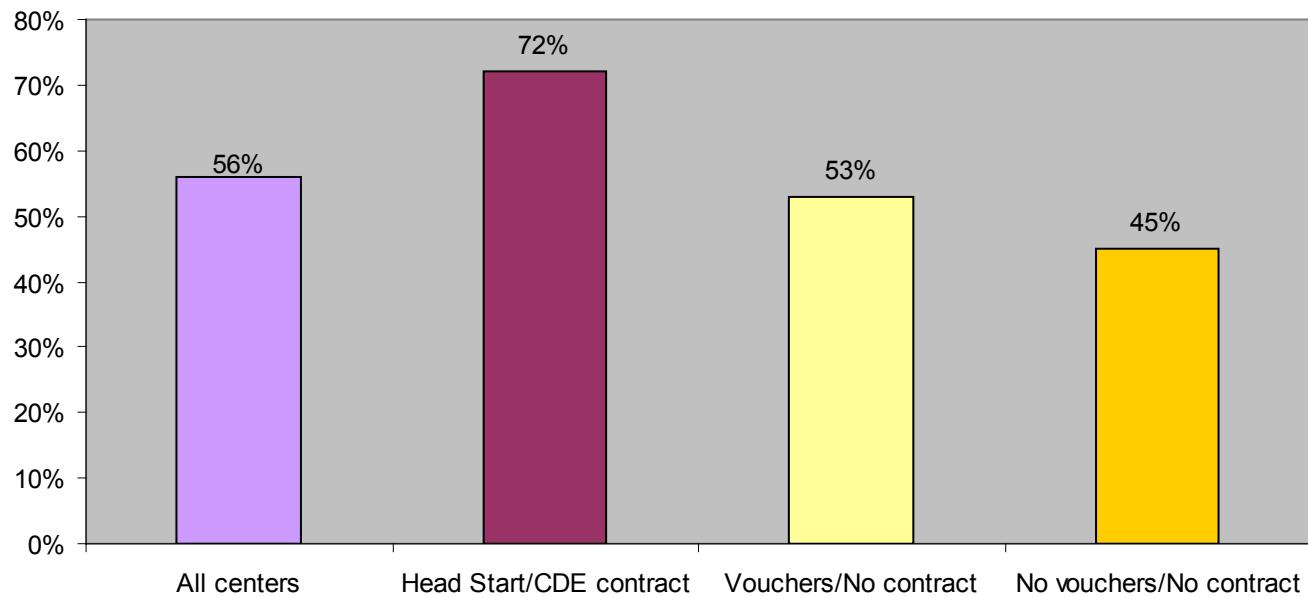
As shown in Figure 5, degreed teachers in contracted centers were more likely to have an ECE-related degree than were teachers in centers receiving vouchers or in centers with no public funding. Seventy-three percent of teachers in contracted programs with a bachelor's or higher degree held an

ECE-related degree, compared to 65 percent of teachers in centers receiving vouchers. In a similar pattern, 89 percent of teachers with an associate degree in contracted centers held an ECE-related degree, compared to 80 percent of such teachers in centers receiving vouchers. (Further, contracted centers had more assistant teachers with associate degrees [14 percent] than did centers receiving vouchers [10 percent] or centers with no public funding [12 percent].)

Training and Education Related to Dual Language Learning

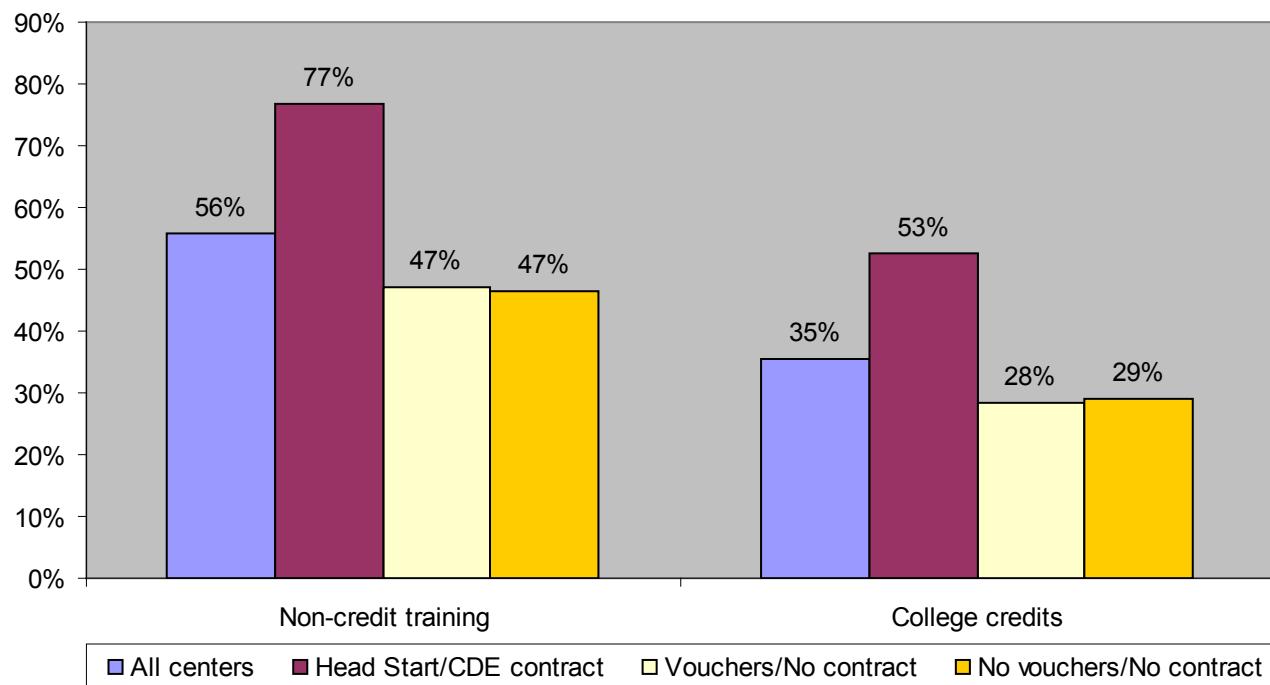
As noted above, 39 percent of children entering public kindergarten in California during the 2005-2006 school year were classified as English language learners (California Department of Education, 2006), and it is likely that soon most young children in ECE programs will be dual language learners and/or live with family members who do not speak English. But teachers' level of preparedness to work with dual language learning children varied substantially by centers' subsidy status. Centers operating under a contract with Head Start or CDE reported that, on average, nearly two-thirds of teachers had participated in non-credit training, and nearly one-third of teachers had completed college credits, on this subject. Teachers in centers receiving vouchers were three to four times less likely to have participated in such professional development. (See Figure 6.)

Figure 7: Estimated Percentage of Licensed Centers Serving at Least One Child with Special Needs: Statewide, and By Relationship to Public Subsidy



Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

Figure 8: Estimated Mean Percentage of Teachers Who Have Completed Training/Education Related to Special Needs Children: Statewide, and By Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy



Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

Training and Education Related to Children with Special Needs

Over the last 30 years, the deepening understanding of and ability to identify developmental challenges, coupled with changes in federal law,⁴ have led to the increased involvement of early childhood settings in providing services to children with special physical and development needs and/or disabilities (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Recognizing that the early care and education workforce was being increasingly called upon to provide such services, the California Legislature passed SB1703 in 2000, to support local child care resource and referral programs and child care planning councils in providing training related to children with special needs. This funding was renewed in 2005.

As shown in Figure 7, contracted centers were more likely to serve at least one child with special needs (72 percent) than were non-contracted centers receiving vouchers (53 percent). In addition, as shown in Figure 8, centers that held a contract

with Head Start or CDE reported significantly higher percentages of teachers who had participated in special needs-related training or college courses than did non-contracted centers receiving vouchers.

Question 2. How does staff stability vary by centers' subsidy status?

Turnover and Tenure

Center staff stability has been linked to overall program quality, the ability of a program to improve its quality, and children's social and verbal development (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1998; Whitebook & Sakai, 2004). Staff turnover – namely, how much change in staffing a center has undergone in the previous year – provides one important index of center workforce stability. Staff tenure provides another such measure. To measure rates of tenure, we asked directors to report how many teachers, assistant teachers and directors had been employed at their center for less than one year,

Table 3. Estimated Mean Percentage of Annual Job Turnover Among Teachers, Assistant Teachers and Directors: Statewide, and By Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy

	All centers	Head Start or CDE contract	Vouchers/No contract	No vouchers/ No contract
Teachers*	22%	23%	26%	16%
	(0.9)	(1.8)	(1.5)	(1.3)
Number of centers	7,722	2,291	3,203	2,278
Assistant teachers	26%	23%	32%	23%
	(1.5)	(1.6)	(3.2)	(2.2)
Number of centers	5,534	2,013	2,146	1,375
Directors	18%	22%	17%	14%
	(1.3)	(3.1)	(2.1)	(2.0)
Number of centers	5,590	1,564	2,518	1,508

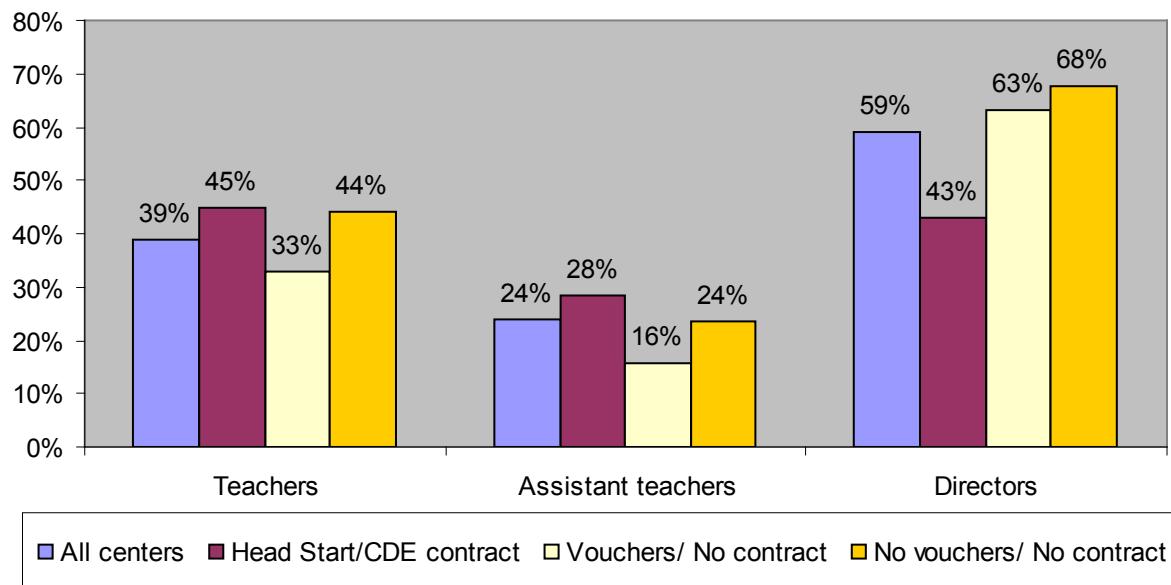
Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

* p < .05, No vouchers/No contract < all others

⁴Two federal laws in particular have contributed to the inclusion of children with special needs in early childhood programs. The American with Disabilities Act (ADA), a federal civil rights law passed in 1990, prohibits discrimination by child care centers and family child care providers against individuals with disabilities. The ADA requires providers to assess, on a case-by-case basis, what a child with a disability requires in order to be fully integrated into a program, and whether reasonable accommodation can be made to allow this to happen. In addition, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, passed in 1975 and reauthorized in 2004, requires public schools to meet the educational needs of children as young as three with disabilities, guarantees early intervention services to infants and toddlers up to age three in their "natural environments," and addresses the transition of infants and toddlers from early intervention services to preschool programs. California's equivalent law, the Early Intervention Services Act, is also known as Early Start (Child Care Law Center, 2005).

⁵In addition, since Head Start and State Preschool staff generally work for a shorter program year, following a traditional school-year calendar, the wage disparity between staff in non-contracted and contracted centers is even greater than Figure 10 indicates.

Figure 9: Estimated Percentage of Teachers, Assistant Teachers and Directors who Have been at their Jobs for More than Five Years: Statewide, and By Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy



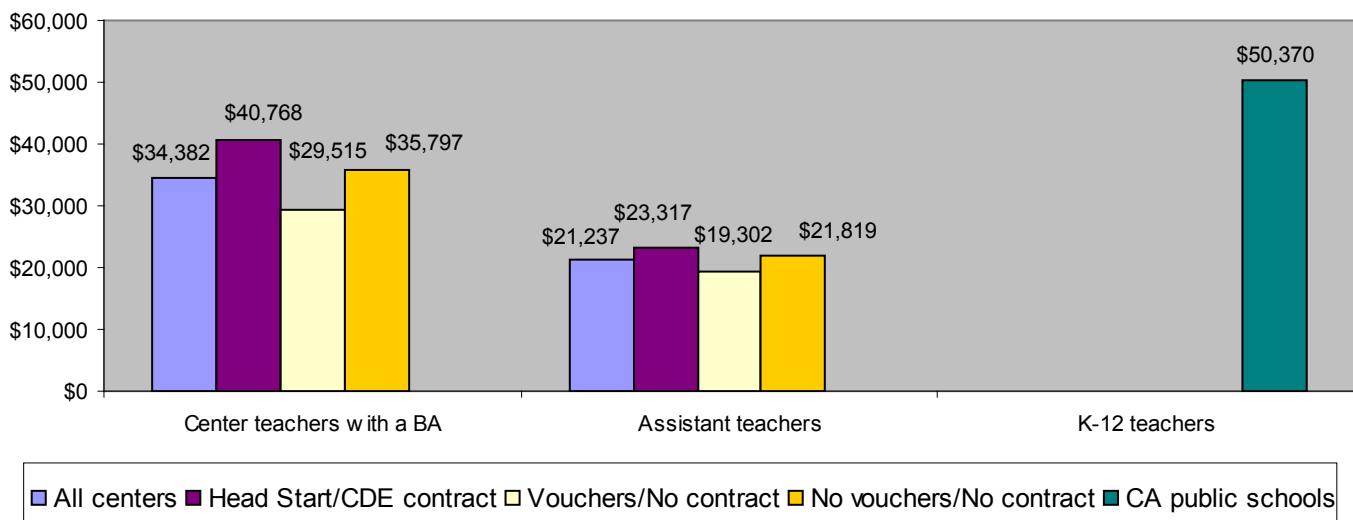
Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

from one to five years, and for more than five years.

As shown in Table 3, there were no significant differences in teacher turnover between contracted centers and centers receiving vouchers, but centers receiving no public dollars

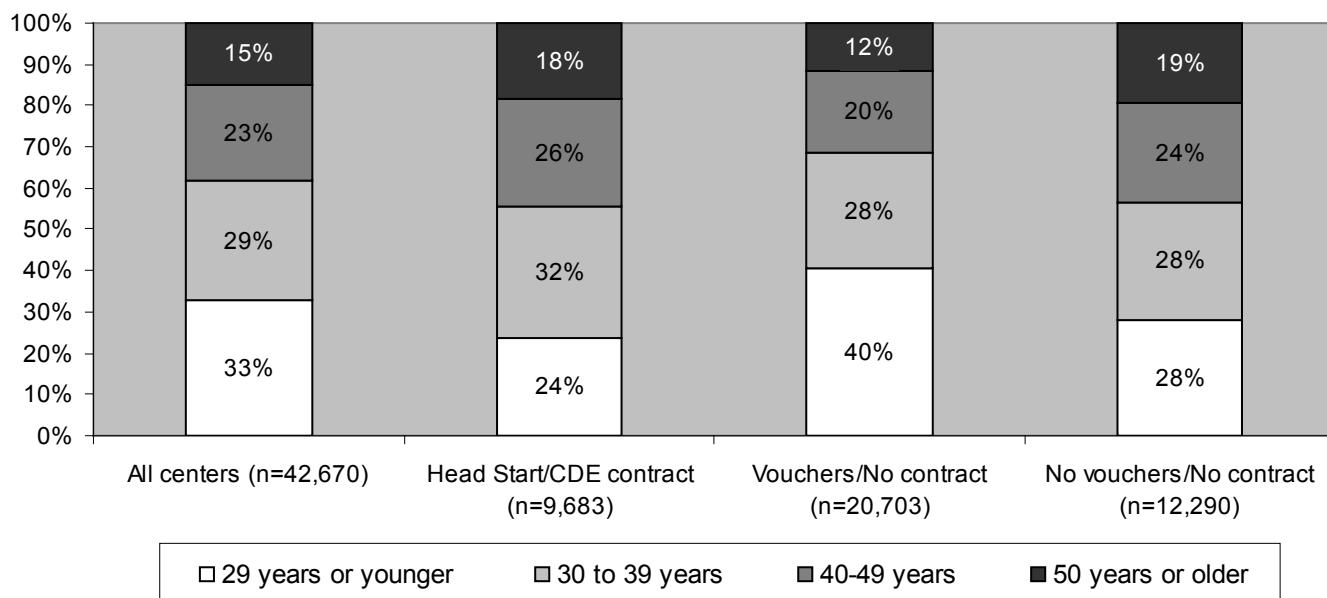
reported the lowest teacher turnover rate. In both types of subsidized center, teacher turnover rates were about twice that of public school teachers (11 percent; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005).

Figure 10: Estimated Mean Highest Salaries Paid to Teachers with BA or Higher Degree and to Assistant Teachers, Compared to K-12 Teachers: Statewide, and By Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy



Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

Figure 11: Estimated Age Range of Teachers: Statewide, and By Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy

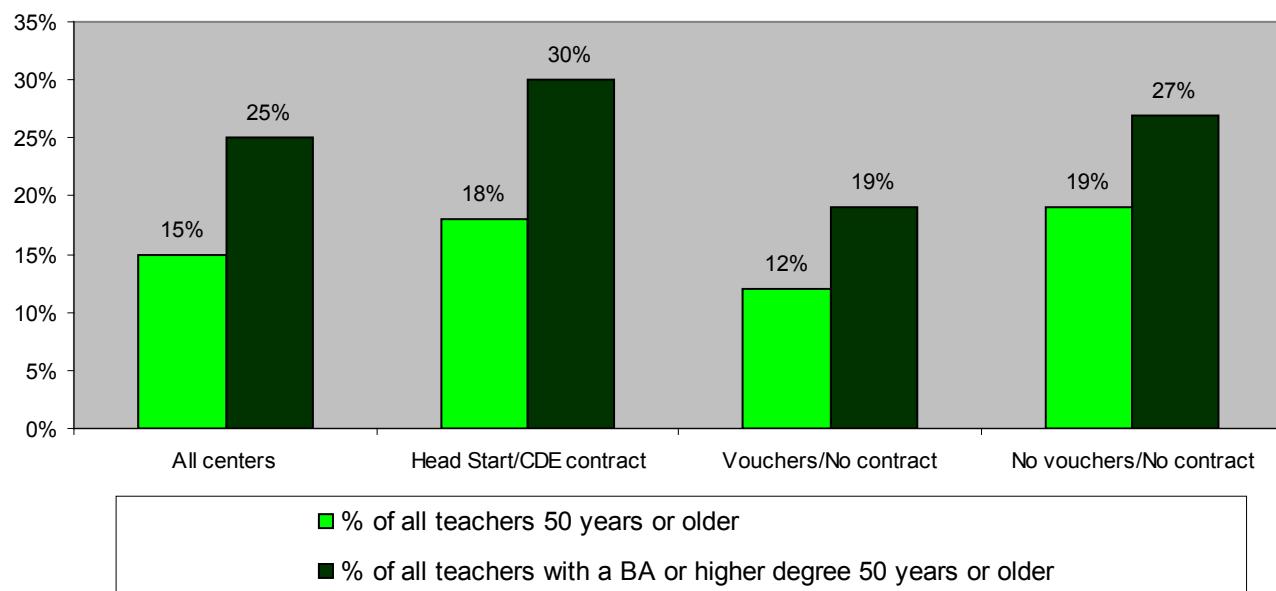


Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

We did find some differences in teacher tenure by centers' subsidy status, although these findings were somewhat mixed. Teachers and assistant teachers in centers receiving vouchers were the least likely to have been employed

at their centers for more than five years. Directors of centers receiving vouchers, however, were more likely than their counterparts in contracted centers to have been in their current jobs for more than five years. (See Figure 9.)

Figure 12. Estimated Percentage of Teachers by Age and Educational Attainment: Statewide, and By Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy



Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

Wages

Given the documented relationship between turnover and program quality, the persistence of high turnover in the ECE field, often linked with poor compensation, is of serious concern. As shown in Figure 10, salaries for teaching staff varied by centers' relationship to public subsidy. On average, centers receiving vouchers paid lower salaries than contracted centers to teachers with a bachelor's or higher degree, and to assistant teachers.⁵ Still, teachers with a bachelor's or higher degree in contracted centers were, on average, paid about \$10,000 less per year than teachers in California public schools.

Approaching retirement age

The age of staff also impacts centers' future stability as older staff members approach retirement age. Our study found that the ages of teachers varied by centers' subsidy status, with contracted centers reporting a higher percentage of teachers who were age 50 or older. In addition, we found that teachers in contracted centers with a bachelor's or higher degree were more much more likely to be 50 or older than teachers with less education.

As shown in Figure 11, contracted centers reported a higher percentage of teachers over age 50 (18 percent) and a smaller percentage under 30 (24 percent) than centers receiving

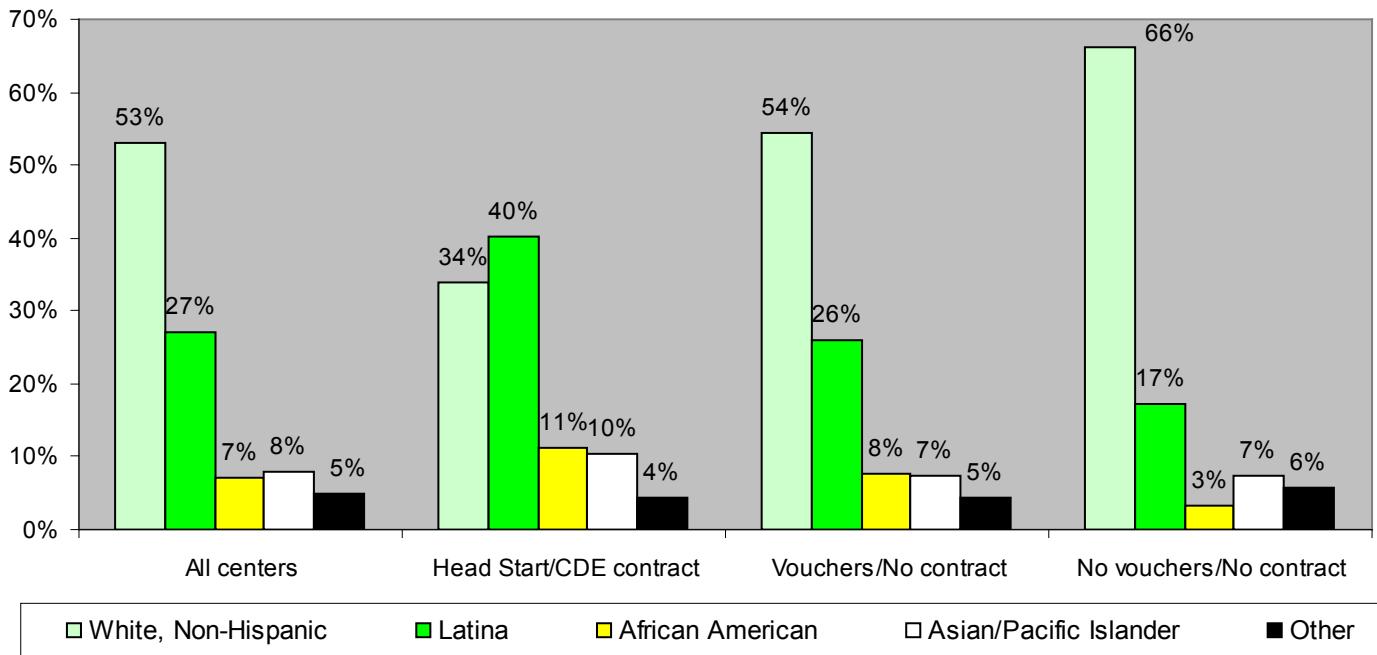
vouchers (12 percent over age 50; 40 percent under 30). In addition, as shown in Figure 12, a substantially greater percentage of teachers in contracted centers with a bachelor's or higher degree were age 50 or older (30 percent) than in non-contracted centers receiving vouchers (19 percent).

Question 3: How does the ethnic and linguistic background of staff vary by centers' subsidy status?

Overview

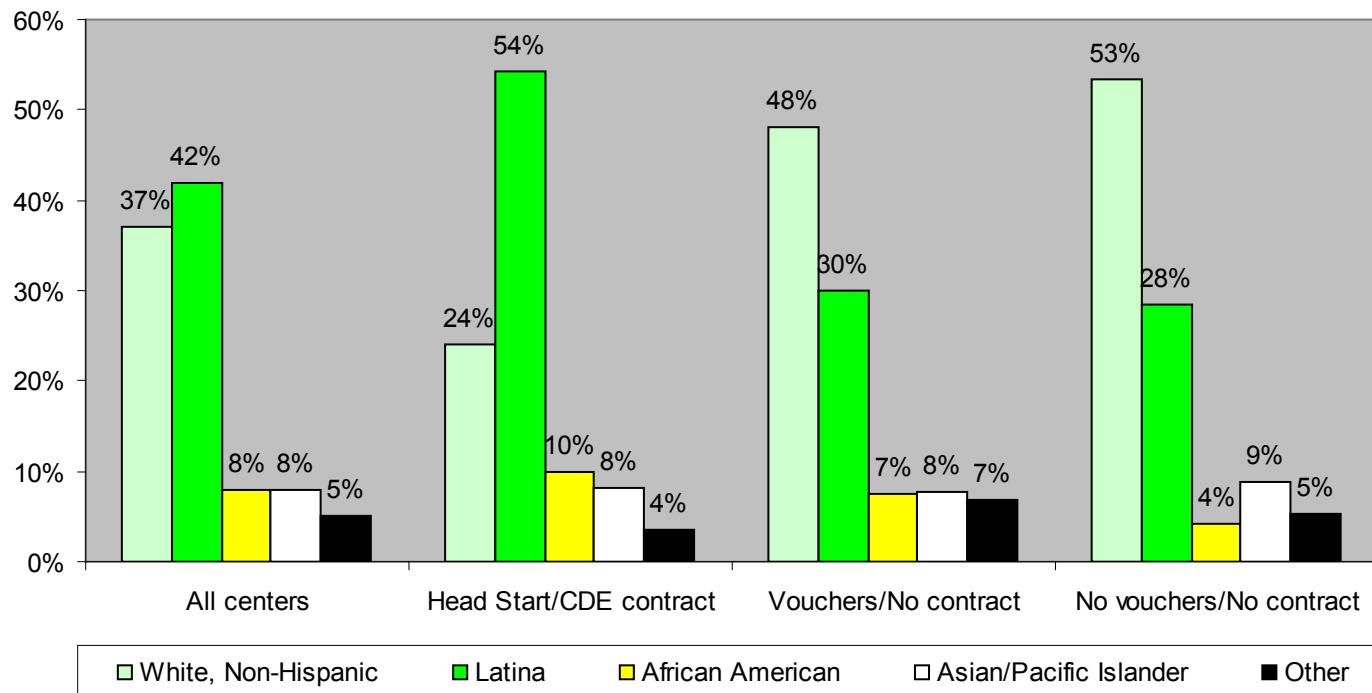
The population of children served by California's early care and education workforce is characterized by great ethnic and linguistic diversity. According to data from the California Department of Education, 39 percent of children entering public kindergarten in California in during the 2005-2006 school year were classified as English language learners, (California Department of Education, 2006). With respect to ethnicity, only 30 percent of California's children from birth to age five were White, Non-Hispanic as of 2004 (California Department of Finance, 2004). As a result, there is understandable concern about the ability of the ECE workforce to communicate well with children and their families, and to create learning environments for children that build upon their first language as a foundation for successful mastery of English (Garcia, 2005; Sakai & Whitebook, 2003; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 1999). There is also concern that children

Figure 13: Estimated Ethnicity of Teachers: Statewide, and By Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy



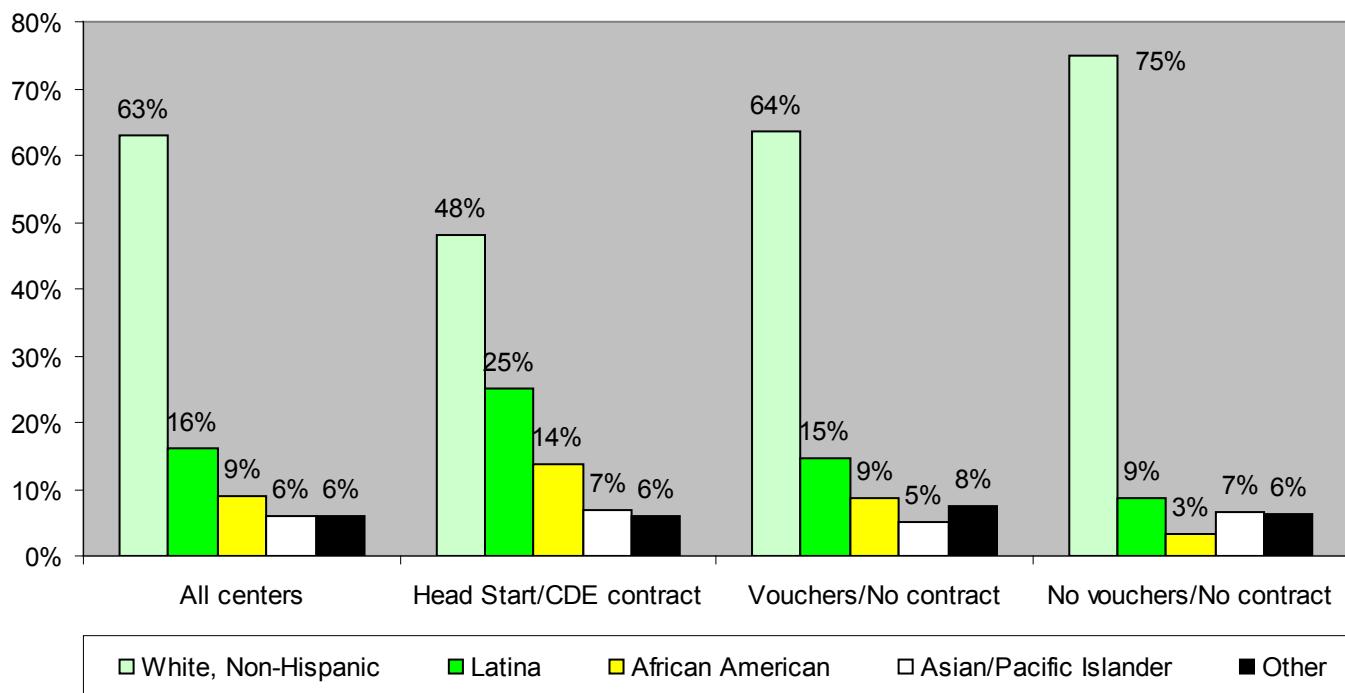
Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

Figure 14. Estimated Ethnicity of Assistant Teachers: Statewide, and By Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy



Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

Figure 15: Estimated Ethnicity of Directors: Statewide, and By Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy



Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

have teachers from their own cultural group as role models. It is a commonly shared goal among policy makers and advocates to build not only a more educated, but also an ethnically and linguistically diverse, ECE workforce (Calderon, 2005).

Ethnicity

The ethnic composition of assistant teachers, teachers and directors differed substantially by the subsidy status of their centers, with contracted centers having the most ethnically diverse staff. As shown in Figure 13, contracted programs employed a much more diverse pool of teachers than did non-contracted programs receiving vouchers or centers receiving no public funding. About one-third of teachers in contracted programs were White, Non-Hispanic, compared to 54 percent of teachers in centers receiving vouchers and 66 percent of teachers in centers with no public funding. On the other hand, 40 percent of teachers in contracted centers were Latina, compared to 26 percent of teachers in centers receiving vouchers, and only 17 percent of teachers in centers with no public funding.

The ethnicity of assistant teachers followed a similar pattern, as shown in Figure 14. Fifty-four percent of assistant teachers in contracted programs were Latina, while this was true of less than one-third of assistant teachers in centers receiving vouchers (30 percent) or centers with no public funding

(28 percent).

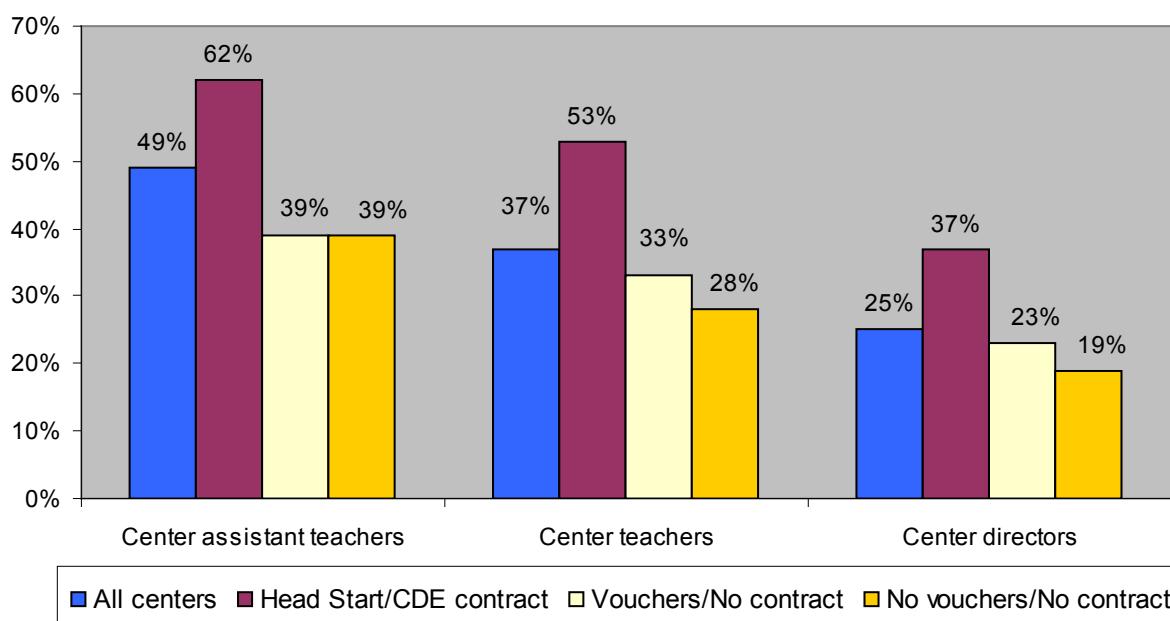
Director ethnicity also varied substantially by centers' subsidy status. As shown in Figure 15, 48 percent of directors in contracted centers were White, Non-Hispanic, compared to 64 percent in centers receiving vouchers and 75 percent in centers with no public funding.

Linguistic Background

The linguistic background of staff also varied by centers' subsidy status, with contracted centers employing the greatest percentage of staff who could speak a language other than English fluently. Contracted centers reported that 53 percent of their teachers were fluent in a language other than English, compared to one-third of teachers in centers receiving vouchers and 28 percent of teachers in non-contracted centers. The linguistic background of assistant teachers and directors followed the same pattern. (See Figure 16.)

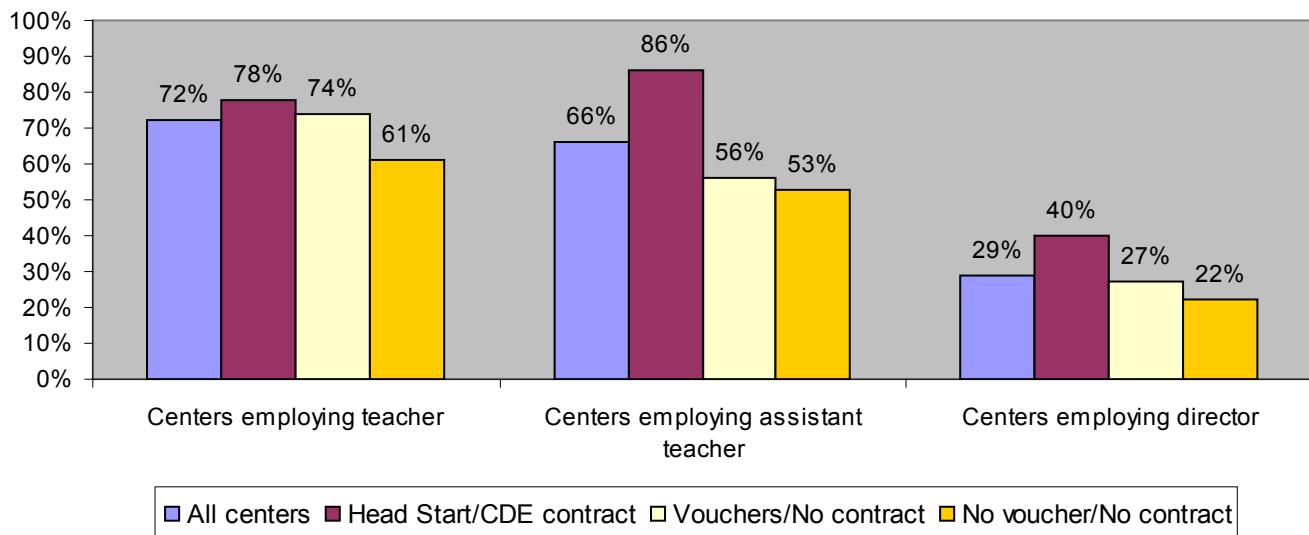
In addition to looking at the overall percentage of staff speaking a language other than English, it is important to examine the distribution of these staff across centers. As shown in Figure 17, contracted centers were more likely than centers receiving vouchers or centers receiving no public funding to employ at least one teacher or assistant teacher who spoke a language other than English fluently.

Figure 16: Estimated Percentage of the ECE Workforce Speaking a Language Other Than English, by Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy



Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

Figure 17. Estimated Percentage of Centers With At Least One Staff Person Able to Communicate Fluently in a Language Other Than English: Statewide, and by Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy



Source: Whitebook et al. (2006a). Note: Based on sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

Finally, among centers that employed at least one teacher with the capacity to communicate in a language other than English, contracted centers employed a greater percentage of such teachers (69 percent, SE=1.5) than non-contracted centers receiving vouchers (46 percent, SE=1.3) or centers receiving no public dollars (49 percent, SE=1.9).

Discussion

The findings presented here point to differences among center-based child care programs, based on public subsidy status, that merit further attention. The evidence suggests that children of low-income families who attend contracted centers will encounter more ethnically and linguistically diverse teachers, with higher levels of education, and a greater likelihood of being trained to work with dual language learners and/or children with special needs, than will children in centers receiving vouchers.

But whether they attend contracted or voucher centers, children who receive public child care subsidy will also encounter more teacher turnover than children attending non-subsidized care. Turnover of assistant teachers is highest in voucher programs, and director turnover is highest in contracted programs. Across all program types, child care staff turnover is roughly twice that reported for teachers in Grades K-12, who typically earn at least \$10,000 more per year than even the highest-paid child care teachers, and typically work for a much shorter school year. Another looming

quality-related issue concerns the ageing child care workforce – notably in contracted centers, where teachers, particularly the most educated, are an older group overall than in other centers.

While these findings do not definitively speak to the quality of various programs that receive public subsidy, they do suggest considerable differences in staffing across sectors and types of center-based care. Within the world of K-12 education, inequities among and within school districts have been deemed unacceptable, leading to court challenges and other policy interventions – and where disparities persist, there is a prevailing belief that these should be remedied. This sensibility is less prevalent in the world of early care and education, in large part because concern focuses more heavily on access to care, rather than on ensuring that all children attend high-quality, developmentally appropriate programs. And while the present study only pertains to center-based care, other research has suggested that even greater disparities exist for children who receive subsidy through licensed or license-exempt home-based care (Phillips et al., 1994; Whitebook et al., 2004).

In California, two sets of state policies place our findings in context. The first has to do with the stringency of regulations that apply to different sectors of the child care market. Centers receiving vouchers are not required to meet standards for teacher education or ratios beyond those set by licensing, but centers contracted with the state must employ more teachers per children, and teachers must complete 24 units

of college coursework in early childhood, plus 16 units of general education, as opposed to the 12 units required by licensing for teachers in other centers. The second set of policies relates to infrastructure support available to contracted centers. While far from adequate, there are more dedicated dollars for training and education in contracted centers than in other child care programs, and at times, there have also been resources to cover staff time for training.

Inequities in access to quality care and education are likely to perpetuate inequities in school readiness not only between children of low-income and higher-income families, but within the most disadvantaged group of children in our society, based on the type of care they receive. While an assessment of quality was beyond the scope of this study, our findings suggest that children are experiencing care of varying quality as determined by the type of subsidized setting they attend – and child care enrollment, far from being purely a matter of parental choice, is often constrained by limited availability or accessibility of particular types of care, especially when parents' work schedules include evenings, nights or weekends.

In the context of a growing call for eliminating school readiness and achievement gaps among different groups of children in our society, it is of serious concern that public child care subsidy policy may be contributing to, rather than relieving, inequities for children of low-income families. An inclusive reassessment of the kinds of opportunities that public dollars are purchasing for young children is long overdue. A valuable starting point would be to reconsider establishing a single set of regulations for the preparation and professional development of teachers of young children, regardless of the setting in which they work, and to ensure adequate funding to enable existing and potential teaching staff to meet such requirements.

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